

**English National Character vs Russian National Character: Stereotypes**



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***Introduction***

Every nation, in particular the British and the Russians, tends to be attributed with certain characteristics that are supposedly typical. These characteristics are known as stereotypes being born in our mind to help us make distinctions. In this search there can be read the information about the notion of ‘national character’ and ‘stereotypes’. Furthermore, English and Russian character stereotypes are concerned as unique and great. The more interesting aspect presents some similarities and differences between the above mentioned stereotypes.

***National character***

The term ‘national character’ is used to describe personality characteristics and unique life styles found among the populations of particular nations. It’s believed that there are lots of differences between national groups, for example, between Germans and Italians, or even between northern and southern Italians. Every nation develops over a period of time certain stereotypes of members of other nations.

National character defines who we are, what we are about, and expresses our ideals. It exhibits culture, and distinguishes personal backgrounds of people of various countries.

During and after World War II appeared a set of [anthropological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_anthropology) studies. Scientists conducted researches connected with national character.

National character studies arose from a variety of approaches with culture and personality, including the configurationalist approach of [Edward Sapir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Sapir) and [Ruth Benedict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Benedict), the basic personality structure developed by [Ralph Linton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Linton) and Abram Kardiner, and the modal personality approach of [Cora DuBois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cora_DuBois). These approaches couldn’t agree with each other on the exact relationship between personality and culture. The configurationalist and basic approaches treated personality within a culture as relatively homogeneous, while Cora DuBois argued that there are no common personality traits found in every single member of a society.

***Stereotypes and Nation***

There are many [stereotypes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype) that surround [nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation). The stereotypes may be truth about them, but these stereotypes are not wholly correct, and often are heavily misleading. It occurs negative stereotypes have been spread by one country in order to discredit another. Countries may promote national stereotypes about themselves in order to instill a sense of [patriotism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriotism).

***Stereotypes about English Character***

* **Adherence to traditions**

Many things that are regarded as typically British derive from books, songs, and plays. They existed a long time ago and are no longer representative of modern life. One popular belief is that Britain is a ‘land of tradition’. It may concern traditions that are seen in public life: the annual ceremony of the state opening of Parliament, the military ceremony of ‘trooping the color’, the changing of the life guard outside Buckingham Palace.

However, the British less inclined to follow tradition than the people of other countries. There are few ancient customs that are followed by the majority of families on special occasions: local parades or processions. It can be clearly identified in the English language. It has fewer proverbs and saying in comparison with other languages.

There are some examples of supposedly typical British traditions that are simply not typical any more:

* London is a ‘city gent’.

London always had the stereotyped image of such a city and included the wearing of a bowler hat.

* ‘English’ or ‘British’ breakfast.

It is believed the British have breakfast that consists of cereal with milk and followed by toast, butter and marmalade, all washed down with lots of tea. But only 10 % of people actually have this sort of breakfast. Most have just cereal, tea, and toast. The majority of the people have a ‘continental’ (European) breakfast.

* The British are tea-drinkers.

It’s still true that tea is prepared in a distinctive way: strong and with milk. But more coffee than tea is now bought in the country’s shops. As for the tradition of afternoon tea with biscuits, scones, sandwiches or cake, this is a minority activity.

* The British love queuing.

Surely, the British form queues whenever they are waiting for something, but this doesn’t mean they enjoy it.

* **Intellectualism**

Among many people in Britain, there exists a suspicion of intelligence, education, and ‘high-culture’. Teachers and academic staff don’t have as high status as they do in most countries. Nobody normally proclaims their academic qualifications or title to the world at large. No professor would expect, or want, to be addressed as ‘Professor’ on any but the most formal occasions. The upper and working classes don’t encourage their children to go to university. The lack for enthusiasm for education is certainly decreasing. It’s still unusual for parents to arrange extra private tuition for their children, even among those who can easily afford it.

To refer to a person as somebody who ‘gets all their ideas from books’ is to speak of them negatively, the word ‘clever’ often has negative connotations. It suggests someone who uses trickery, a person who can’t be trusted.

* **Conservatism**

Though the British have few living traditions and are too individualistic to have the same everyday habits as each other. This doesn’t mean they like changing. They may not behave in traditional ways, but they like symbols of tradition and stability. The British value continuity over modernity for its own sake. They don’t consider it especially smart to live in a new house because there is prestige in living in an obviously old one. They have a general sentimental attachment to older, safer times. Their Christmas cards usually depict scenes from past centuries. They like their pubs to look old. They are reluctant to change their system of currency. And a look at children’s reading habits suggests this attitude is not going to change. Publishers try hard to make the books for children up-to-date. The most popular of all children’s writers are still Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton. Their stories contain no references to other races or classes and mention nothing more modern than a radio.

* **Being Different**

The British are rather proud of being different. For example, it’s difficult to imagine they will ever agree to change from driving on the left-hand side of the road to driving on the right. The case of double-decker buses is one more example. Whenever an EU committee makes a recommendation about standardizing the size and shape of these buses, they declined it. Systems of measurement are another example. The British government has been trying for years and years to promote the metric system and to get the British to use the same scales that are used nearly everywhere else in the world. British manufactures are obliged to give the weight of their tins and packets in kilos and grams. But everybody in Britain till shops in pounds and ounces. The weather forecasters on the television use the Celsius scale of temperature. But nearly everybody thinks in Fahrenheit. The British measure distances, amounts of liquid and themselves using scales of measurement that are not used anywhere else in Europe. Even the use of the 24-hour clock is comparatively restricted.

* **The Love of Nature**

Most of the British live in towns and cities. but they have an idealized vision of the countryside. To the British, the countryside has almost none of the negative associations which it has in many countries including poor facilities, lack of educational opportunities, unemployment and poverty. The countryside for them means peace and quiet, beauty, good health and no crime. Ideally, this village would consist of thatched cottages built around an area of grass known as a ‘village green’.

This love of the countryside is another aspect of British conservatism. The countryside represents stability. Those who live in towns and cities take an active interest in country matters and the British regard it as both a right and a privilege to be able to go ‘into the country’ whenever they want to. Large areas of the country are official ‘national parks’ where no building is allowed. Even if they can’t get into the countryside, the British spend a lot of time with ‘nature’. They grow plants. Gardening is one of the most popular hobbies in the country. Those who don’t have a garden can participate. Each local authority owns several areas of land which it rents very cheaply to these people in small parcels. On these ‘allotments’, people grow mainly vegetables.

* **Love of Animals**

The British tend to have a sentimental attitude to animals. Nearly half of the households in Britain keep at least one domestic animal. The status of pets is taken seriously. For example, it’s illegal run over a dog in your car and then keep on driving. You have to stop and inform the owner. Many people are prepared to pay quite large sums of money to give their pets a decent burial. Rossendale Pet Cemetery in Lancashire is just one example of an animal graveyard.

Wildlife programs are by far the most popular kind of television documentary. Many families have ‘bird-tables’ in their gardens. They are enthusiastic bird-watchers. There is even a special hospital which treats injured wild animals.

* **Formality**

The tourists can watch some formal ceremonies. Thus, they draw the conclusion the British are rather formal in their general behaviour. This is not true. There is a difference between observing formalities and being formal. For example let’s take into account clothing. It depends on whether a person is playing a public role or a private role. When people are ‘on duty’, they have to obey some quite rigid rules. When people are not playing a public role, there seem to be no rules at all. The British are more tolerant of strange ‘clothing’ than in most other countries.

The people from other countries often experience coldness among the British. It’s because being friendly in Britain often involves showing that you aren’t bothering with the formalities. This means not addressing someone by his or her title, not addressing smartly when entertaining guests, not shaking hands when meeting and not saying ‘please’ when making a request. When they avoid doing these things with you, the British aren’t being unfriendly or disrespectful, they are simply that you are in the category ‘friend’, and all the rules can be ignored. The formalities only put distance between the people involved. The same is true about shaking hands. This sometimes is considered of the British culture. Most people would do it only when being introduced to a stranger or when meeting an acquaintance after a long time. Most British don’t feel welcomed if, on being invited to somebody’s house, they find the hosts in smart clothes and a grand table set for them.

It’s probably true that the British are more reserved than the people of many other countries. They find it difficult to indicate friendship by open displays of affection. It’s not the convention to kiss when meeting a friend. If you are in a British person’s house, and you are told to ‘help yourself’ to something, your host is not being rude or suggesting you are of no importance.

* **Public Spiritedness and Amateurism**

In public life Britain is traditionally followed what might be called ‘the cult of the talented amateur. Some new areas of amateur participation in public life have developed in the last decade. Thousands of ‘amateurs’ are still actively involved in charity work. They raise money by organizing jumble sales, flag days. This voluntary activity is a basic part of British life.

* **Privacy**

Respect for privacy underlies many aspects of British life. So it’s seen rude to ask people what are called ‘personal’ questions (for example, about how much money they earn or about their family life) unless you know them very well. The conversational formula that is used as introduction to someone “how do you do?” is not interpreted as a real request for information at all: the conversational reply is not to ‘answer the question’ but to reply by saying “how do you do?” too.

***Stereotypes about Russian Character***

* **‘Spacious soul’ or ‘big nature’,** - it’s the first thing to be heard about the Russian national character. The meaning of this phrase is not so easy to define.

Imagine the vast territory of this country from Europe to Asia, with a lot of landscapes, nations and cultures and you will perceive its infinity in the unconscious collective mind of its people. A foreigner or a resident must have much time to visit all the places of Russia. That’s why you mention such features of the Russian character as generosity, spontaneity, weakness for extremes, longing for the unknown, unpredictability, lack of order, certainty.

* **‘Go there no one knows where and bring nobody knows what’,** - the task is given to the main heroes in lots of Russian tales. The mission sounds absurd to foreigners. The hero gets a magic object that shows him the right path to follow. And a Russian person is guided by intuition rather than by a strong reason.

One not living in Russia should remember when planning something in this country, keep free space left for alternative ways and be prepared that with the Russians some plans might change and events take quite another turn.

* **‘All that is done is done for the better’,** - it’s one of the favorite Russian sayings. It implies an optimistic and adventurous outlook for some people, but sheer fatalism and passivity for other people. The Russians always adapt to changing circumstances rather than to oppose them. That feature is quite clear if you take into account our history of upheavals and cataclysms, world and civil wars, revolutions, repressions, reforms.
* **‘Hope for the better and be ready for the worst’,** - you can hear from the Russians. Because they hope that “it will work out somehow by itself”. Perhaps it is for that notorious Russian carelessness that we are easily beguiled and made use of by various leaders coming in a long train.
* **Justice and law**. The Russians don’t consider these two notions to be synonymous. People and authorities agree on one thing – mutual mistrust. The Russians believe the state works as a mechanism that encroaches upon the rights and freedoms of its citizens but doesn’t protect them. There’s a famous joke: “The severity of law is compensated with its loose observance”. Relations between people are regulated by the idea of justice, which is in Russian law. If you have problems caused by certain public or legal institutions, discuss it with your Russian friends. Maybe you will get some expert advice concerning ways out.
* **Revolutionists or conformists?** The Russians are patient and this patience is extremely endless as a Russian country. They seem to endure any privations and severities. For foreigners, the Russians have a sort of liking to bear this cross, a certain pride for it. The habit for hardships and peaceful nature make the Russians conformists: we hate open conflicts and prefer compromising: “A lean compromise is better than a fat lawsuit”.
* **Lazy or efficient?** Russian laziness is believed widespread almost as Russian “spacious soul”. Every Russian soul is visited by Yemelya. He is a great idler, a fairy-tale hero. He does not get off his stove because it can carry him anywhere and all his wishes come true due to magic. Unfortunately, most of great ideas are not realized for laziness. The Russians think ten times if something is worth doing. A foreigner working in Russia, must keep in mind that a Russian needs time to “pull oneself together” to reach a goal. But when he is ready and interested or emotionally involved, he can beat records. The Russians enjoy challenges and can work overtime.
* **Generous spendthrifts.** The vastness of this land implies our full-handedness. Fond of making handsome gestures, we enjoy surprising our friends and guests with generous gifts and regales. Even if the hosts are having hard times, they will do their best to treat their guests well. Naturally, the same generosity is expected from you - and it should be sincere. Pettiness and greediness are considered real sins here. Counting expenses on friendly meetings or checking the bill in a restaurant will seem petty. It is natural that everyone contributes to the common good as much as one can. Not long ago it was ok to lend money to a friend in need and forget about it. Nowadays, the commercialization of this country makes the Russians more and more tough-minded and shrewd. But that is not natural for us. It is in our blood to share what we have and hope on somebody's help. Who knows better than the Russians that material wealth is the most unreliable thing? 'God has given, and God will take it back', a Russian saying goes, often used with regard to money and possessions. 'Give, spend and God will send' also suits here. Deep down, the privacy of material possessions is doubted. Surely that has to do with the notorious
* **Russian collectivism**, which is more than just an aftermath of the Soviet times. It takes its roots in the communal living of the Old Rus and the Orthodox moral values. Our inclination to work jointly for the common good, share what we have and rely on somebody's help is based on the feeling of kindred with other people. That is well reflected in the Russian language: a number of words denoting blood relations, such as sonny, mummy, grandpa, grandma, daddy, daughter, sister, etc. can be used when informally addressing somebody, even strangers. The most intimate word expressing deep feelings between soulmates is *rodnoy* (akin and that's why dear).
* **‘Better have a hundred friends than a hundred roubles’**. In Russia it works a hundred-per-cent. Personal relations play here a more important role than one's social status or bank account. The dark side of it is that a person's success often depends on profitable connections rather than on one's talents and professionalism. However, this misuse of the unwritten law on mutual aid is weakening nowadays, together with the feeling of fellowship. Yet, it is still habitual among students and co-workers to help each other rather than compete, which is more customary for the Westerners.
* **‘What is good for a Russian, for a German is death’**.This saying goes around Russia. Nowadays Russia bent on the Western and European standards is driving towards stability and living on credit, convenient but binding. Yet, it will hardly ever become that stable. Extra stability verging on routine is very suppressing for the Russians. Smooth and scheduled living and working void of variation and collision, that makes a European feel comfortable will depress a Russian. Yet, there is no such a risk - we'll always find some entanglements to use our century-old cultivated resourcefulness.

***Conclusion***

According to the research it can be noted that many stereotypes are just believes and are never proved. So there exist the following stereotypes about English character: adherence to traditions, intellectualism, conservatism, being different, the love of animals and nature, formality, public spiritedness and amateurism.

Stereotypes about English character include: ‘spacious soul’ or ‘big nature’,‘go there no one knows where and bring nobody knows what’, ‘all that is done is done for the better’, ‘hope for the better and be ready for the worst’, justice and law, evolutionism or conformism, laziness, generous spendthrifts,collectivism, ‘better have a hundred friends than a hundred roubles’, ‘what is good for a Russian, for a German is death’.

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